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Before the COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES SENATE
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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this very important topic relating to the proliferation of information promoting bomb making, violence, and anarchy via use of the Internet.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms recently ran a simple Internet query of "pipe bomb," using several commonly used search engines. This query produced nearly 3 million "hits" of web-sites containing information on pipe bombs. The top ten matches included articles describing in great detail how to construct a variety of pipe bombs using readily available materials. One such site, which claimed to represent a militia group, seemed to particularly target juveniles because it highlighted how model rocket engines and fireworks sparklers could be substituted for explosives and fuses.

Though the recent tragedy in Littleton, Colorado, has focused this nation's attention on the role of the Internet (and other media) in promoting or otherwise facilitating bomb making and other crimes of violence, this phenomenon is not new to ATF.

The use of computer bulletin boards to obtain bomb-making instructions first came to ATF's attention in 1985, when five separate bombing incidents were attributed to knowledge gained from the Internet. From 1985 to 1995, 35 bombing incidents were known to have occurred as a result of bomb-making instructions obtained from computer bulletin boards. In 1996, the number of incidents jumped to 20, which represented approximately a 600 percent increase in the average number of incidents annually. It is important to note that these statistics represent only those cases in which related Internet usage was reported.

Clearly, the Internet is one of the most significant technological developments impacting our culture as we enter the 21st Century. The advancement of technology has made computer use so easy that children as young as 3 years of age can comfortably navigate software applications. The Internet, which is enjoyed by millions of people for educational and recreational purposes, provides vast capability to research information available anywhere in the world on any topic. In spite of its primarily positive impact upon society, some negative uses have emerged.

Publications that at one time were primarily marketed only through counterculture markets and anti-Government conferences are now published in their entirety on the Internet. "The Anarchist Cookbook," "The UNABOM Guide to Blowing Up Universities," "Pipe and Fire Bomb Designs: A guide for Police Bomb Technicians," and "US Army, EOD Improvised Explosives Manual" are just a few of the publications that are posted on various websites.

Juveniles, who are already responsible for a large number of the total bombing or attempted bombing incidents each year, may be particularly susceptible to such information. From 1993 to 1997, 13,510 bombings or attempted bombings were reported to ATF. Of these incidents, 4,619—a full 34 percent--were attributed to juveniles (i.e., by Federal statute, those who are less than 18 years of age). The statistical percentages of juvenile bombings vary widely geographically. For example, during that period, the State of Arizona reported 617 bombing or attempted bombing incidents, of which 66 percent were attributed to juveniles. At the same time, South Carolina reported 44 bombing or attempted bombing incidents, of which 38 percent were committed by juveniles. Whatever the numbers, it can be safely concluded that use of explosives by juvenile offenders has reached a level of significance.

As you know, ATF plays a major role in the United States and internationally in the investigations of arson- and explosives-related incidents. Since the enactment of the National Firearms Act in 1934, ATF has emerged as the expert Federal agency in the investigation of explosives incidents. ATF's role was further bolstered in 1972, when Congress passed the Organized Crime Control Act.

Additionally, because we regulate the firearms and explosives industries, we have unique access to information that greatly facilitates the investigation of incidents perpetrated by the use of firearms and explosives. For example, when ATF traces firearms and explosives recovered from crime scenes, we are often able to reconstruct the chain of possession, from their manufacturers, to wholesalers, retailers, first purchasers, and, ultimately, to the criminal suspects.

In 1996, Congress, recognizing ATF's expertise in the investigation of arson- and explosives-related incidents, passed legislation authorizing the Secretary of the Treasury to establish a national repository of information involving arson and the suspected criminal use of explosives. The Treasury Department's authority over this system was included in an amendment to Title 18, United States Code, Section 846 (b). This National Repository, which is in its final phase of development, will help authorized investigators identify case-specific similarities regarding explosive and incendiary device construction, methods of initiation, types of fuels/explosives used, and methods of operation. The system is also capable of linking thefts of explosive material with criminal use of the explosives.

The challenges of the future as they relate to the criminal application of information readily available and protected by the Constitution are many. Educational initiatives targeting our youth and proactive investigative techniques geared toward 21st Century technology must be identified and implemented.

One preventive initiative ATF is currently developing involves working in partnership with Internet service providers to hyperlink sites containing explosives information to an ATF youth violence prevention website, where prevention messages and initiatives

provide information for juveniles, parents, and educators. Just as information can foment criminal activity, we believe it can also deter such activity.

The men and women of ATF are committed to working for a safer and sounder America and appreciate this opportunity to be of service to this committee. I am now prepared to answer any questions you may have.